

The Problem of Common Terminology

By MILAN N. VEGO

The use of precisely defined terms is critical in any profession. It is no less important in the military, and the U.S. Armed Forces are no exception. It is not a question of semantics, as some would say, because the terms should be used and understood properly. This does not mean that terms or their meanings should be defined dogmatically; there is always a need to create new terms or modify existing ones. However, great care should be shown in changing meanings. For example, not everything in military theory and practice is obsolete in the information age. Most terms used over many decades and even centuries are still valid. Some need to

be modified because of changing practices, but that does not mean drastically altering the meanings of existing and well-defined terms. In some cases, the original meaning of the term is retained side by side with the new meaning.

Misunderstanding Meaning

A common mistake in terminology is using the terms *tactical*, *operational*, and *strategic* interchangeably or loosely. Each is related to the corresponding component of military art or level of war or, in some cases, level of command. *Tactical* refers to either the theory or practice of tactics. In general, *operational* has several meanings: it pertains

to an operation or a series of operations; to something that is intended for, or involved in, military operations; or to something that functions properly or is ready for service. This term is also used in combination with a number of other terms (for example, operational readiness, operational control, operational strategy, and operational command). However, in all these and similar cases, *operational* does not mean what is properly understood to lie within the domain of operational art.¹ This term should be used in referring to a certain theoretical or practical aspect of operational warfare.

The term *strategic*, correctly applied, pertains to events or actions that have, or can

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have, a decisive impact on the outcome of a campaign or an entire war. Hence, this term alone should not be used for situations of tactical importance. For instance, it is an exaggeration to consider a bridge, garrison, or air/naval base *strategic*, as often happens. The phrase *strategic corporal*, used frequently by even high-ranking information warfare advocates, is also inappropriate. While the decisions and actions of tactical commanders or single soldiers can have great effects, it is a stretch to suggest that they can have a major impact on the course and outcome of an overall conflict.

The terms *aims*, *goals*, and *objectives* are often used interchangeably. However, there are significant differences in their proper meanings. *Aim* means to direct or intend something toward a given purpose. It also refers to a statement of intent or direction

Effects-based operations (EBO) advocates compound the problem of using proper terms by mixing goals, aims, and objectives. They claim that objectives and tasks are stated in terms of “friendly goals and actions, while effects are stated in the form of behavior and capabilities of systems within the operational environments—friendly, neutral, or adversary behavior.”² EBO proponents are currently trying to redefine the term *objective* by making it broader and more abstract (in essence, by making it indistinguishable from an aim, goal, or effect) in order to make effects, not objectives, the central part of the military decision-making and planning process. The 2006 Joint Publication (JP) 1–02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, defines a *task* as an action or activity (derived from the mission and concept of operations)

Henri de Jomini (1779–1869) insisted that *line of operations* became outdated because of changes in material conditions. Hence, he also changed the meaning of the term as pertaining to an imaginary line along which a force moves from its base of operation toward an assigned physical objective. He used the term *strategic line* for those “important lines which connect the decisive points of the theater of operations either with each other or with the front of operations.”⁴ The Jominian term *line of operations* was widely accepted in all militaries.

JP 3–0, *Doctrine for Joint Operations* (September 2001), states that a line of operations defines the directional orientation of the force in time and space relative to the enemy. It connects the force with its base of operations and its objective. The U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 3–0, *Operations* (2001), adds that in geographic terms, lines of operations connect a series of decisive points that lead to control of the objective or defeat of the enemy force. However, the same doctrinal document confuses the issue by introducing a new but synonymous term, *logical line of operation* (thereby also implying that there are *illogical* lines of operations), for use largely in stability and support operations when positional reference to the enemy has little relevance. This is not necessarily true because posthostilities operations might include counterinsurgency, as the post-major combat phase in Afghanistan and Iraq illustrates. The 2001 FM 3–0 explains that the logical line of operation helps the commander visualize the use of both military and nonmilitary sources of power as means of support. Confusingly, *decisive point* is used for a collection of tasks aimed to achieve a “military condition.” In the new construct, the commander “links multiple objectives and actions with logic of purpose.” Multiple and complementary lines of operations work through a series of objectives. The commanders synchronize activities along multiple lines of operations to achieve the desired endstate (see figure on next page). This definition of what constitutes a logical line of operations is contradictory. Among other things, the well-known and commonly understood term *decisive point* is given entirely new meaning. Series of tasks comprising each logical line of operation are in fact component tasks, and what is defined as a *military condition* is actually the main task. And the so-called endstate actually equals part of the strategic objective in the posthostilities phase.

because of their inherently open-ended nature, aims or goals cannot be used as the basis for military planning

for an action. A *goal* is the result or achievement toward which an effort is directed. It is also a statement of one’s intent, but it is more specific than an aim. Both aims and goals are usually expressed broadly. Both are normally used when referring to national interests. They are, in their essence, the expressions used by strategists and policymakers. Hence, an aim or goal must be converted into something more specific: the *objective*, defined as something that one’s efforts are intended to accomplish or to serve as the basis for military or nonmilitary action. The objective can also be described as the purpose of one’s actions, carried out within a specific space and time. A *military objective* is that which, if controlled, captured, destroyed, neutralized, or annihilated, would result in a drastic change in the military situation. Tactical, operational, and strategic objectives are differentiated by their scale and importance.

The larger the objective, the more difficult it is to accomplish by a single act. In practical terms, then, an objective must be divided into component parts (*tasks*) that, when carried out, would accomplish it. In generic terms, a *task* is defined as a definite piece of work assigned to or expected of a person; a duty; or a matter of considerable labor or difficulty. The task answers the question of *what* needs to be done, while the objective answers the question of *why*.

assigned to an individual or organization to provide a capability. In contrast, the U.S. Joint Forces Command (USJFCOM) defines a *task* as a directive statement used to assign a discrete action or set of actions to an organization that enables accomplishment of a mission or function. A single task may incorporate multiple individual actions. Neither of these definitions implies that a task is integral to the specific military objective or is derived from the objective rather than the mission.

New Meanings

Another problem in the joint community is the lack of understanding of the true meanings of key operational and tactical terms. For instance, *line of operation* is increasingly misused in the U.S. military, although it is well defined in current joint doctrinal publications. The term was introduced into military theory in 1781 by the British general and theorist Henry Lloyd, one of the chief proponents of the so-called geometrical school. Originally, a line of operation was understood as a line linking an army in the field with its supply depots.³ The Prussian theorist Adam Heinrich Dietrich von Buelow (1757–1807) used the same term and contended that all modern warfare was based on lines of operations. Both Lloyd and Buelow understood this term to mean what today is commonly called a *line of communications* or *line of supply*. Antoine

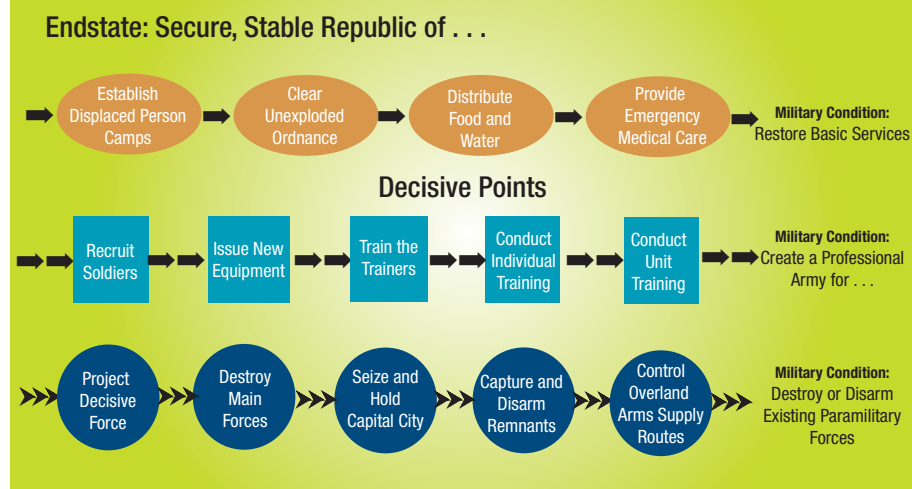
The final coordination draft of JP 3-0, *Joint Operations* (2005), and JP 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning* (2006), added a new meaning to *line of operation*: “a logical line that connects actions on nodes and decisive points related in time and purpose with an objective(s).” As a secondary meaning, the term was also defined as “a physical line that defines the interior or exterior orientation of the force in relation to the enemy or that connects actions on nodes and decisive points related in time and space

objectives.” This definition represents a radical break with the traditional view of what constitutes a strategy. It is in fact a huge step backward. Among other things, it is too simplistic to call strategy a “prudent idea.” In contrast to JP 3-0 (2001), the new definition does not refer to strategy as being both an art and science of matching ends, means, and ways.

JP 5-0 (2006) does not have an entry for *strategy*. However, it provides a definition of *national security strategy* as “the art and

the term underwent numerous changes in Service and joint doctrinal documents. Joint Publications 3-0 (2001), 1-02 (2006), and 5-0 (2006) define *operational art* as the employment of military forces to attain strategic and/or operational objectives through the design, organization, integration, and conduct of strategies, campaigns, major operations, and battles. Operational art translates the joint force commander’s strategy into operational design and ultimately tactical actions by integrating the key activities at all levels of war. A major problem with this definition is that operational art is not considered as both an art and science. Moreover, it does not emphasize that it is an intermediate field of study and practice between strategy and tactics that deals with synchronizing military and nonmilitary sources of power to accomplish strategic or operational objectives in a theater.

Logical Lines of Operations



to an objective(s).” Apparently, the authors confuse *nodes* and *decisive points* as two different things. In fact, nodes in a given system are also decisive points that should be attacked or protected. Obviously, these changes were made for no good reason except to make a space for the currently fashionable “system of systems” approach to the analysis of the military situation.

Another major problem in the U.S. military today is the radical attempt to redefine what constitutes *strategy* and *operational art*. Although considerable differences existed in the past, *strategy* was generally properly defined. For example, JP 3-0 (2001) defines *strategy* as “the art and science of developing and employing instruments of national power in a synchronized and integrated fashion to achieve theater, national, and/or multinational objectives.” Yet the current JP 1-02 (2006) does not provide any definition of what constitutes a strategy. JP 3-0 (2005) defines the term as “a prudent idea or set of ideas for employing the instruments of national power in a synchronized and integrated fashion to achieve theater, national, and/or multinational

science of developing, applying, and coordinating instruments of national power (diplomatic, economic, military, law enforcement, and international) to achieve objectives that contribute to national security. The secondary meaning of the same term refers to the document prepared by the President and National Security Council that outlines national security strategy.” Joint Publication 1-02 (2006) provides essentially the same generic definition of national security strategy as JP 5-0 (2006). In contrast, JP 3-0 (2005) refers only to the national security strategy *document* but does not explain its meaning. Only JP 1-02 (2006) defines *national military strategy* as “the art and science of distributing and applying power to attain national objectives in peace and war.”

Perhaps the biggest problem was properly defining *operational art*. In an early definition, the U.S. Army FM 100-5, *Operations* (1986), described it as “the employment of military forces to attain strategic goals in a theater of war or theater of operations through the design, organization, and conduct of campaigns and major operations.” Afterward,

Existing Terms

Some military terms are misunderstood partly because they are not well defined in the various Service or joint doctrinal publications. One of the most egregious cases is the interchangeable use of *endstate*. Properly understood, this term should be used solely in describing the desired endstate (or perhaps more accurately, *desired strategic endstate*). The desired endstate is part of the strategic guidance. The commander’s intent, however, is often understood as being synonymous with the *endstate*. This is incorrect because the commander’s intent is exclusively focused on the *military* aspects of the situation (or “military landscape”) that the commander wants to see after the mission is accomplished.

The true meaning and purpose of *deployment* and *maneuver* seem not well understood by some leading network-centric warfare advocates, which is puzzling because each term is well defined in Service and joint doctrinal documents. It is well known that force, movement, and mobility are common to both deployment and maneuver. However, they differ in their purpose, timing, location, and need for combat support and combat service support. Deployment is intended to move forces from bases or operating areas to where maneuvers will be conducted. Hence, it normally precedes the maneuver. In contrast to maneuver, which is usually conducted in an area either controlled or disputed by the enemy, deployment is generally carried out in the area of one’s own or friendly control. Forces conducting a maneuver move along



Iraqi soldiers display flag after transfer of operations base from U.S. to Iraqi control

55th Signal Company (Kevin L. Moses, Sr.)

lines of operations, while those carrying out deployment move along lines of communications. Another significant difference is that forces are supported by fires during maneuver (usually not during deployment). Also, one's forces conducting maneuver must be logistically supported and sustained, while those conducting deployment are usually self-sustainable.

feature of the concept is that what represents a decisive point for operational planners usually becomes a task for subordinate tactical commanders. However, this should not be carried too far into the operational or strategic level. For example, obtaining and maintaining sea control or air superiority cannot be viewed as a decisive point, as is often claimed, but rather as an operational or strategic objective to be

instance, define a *campaign* as "a series of related military operations aimed at accomplishing a strategic or operational objective within a given time and space." This definition is imprecise because any definition of a military term pertaining to the method of combat force employment should state in simple terms only the ultimate objective of a given military action. Hence, *operational* not only is redundant in the above definition but also obscures the meaning of *campaign*.

In generic terms, a *campaign* in a war consists of a series of related major operations sequenced and synchronized in time and place to accomplish a military or theater-strategic objective. It is conducted according to a common plan and controlled by a joint or combined forces commander. Land and maritime campaigns are differentiated according to the predominant characteristics of the physical environment. Because of the primarily nonmilitary nature of the strategic objective, a campaign in a low-intensity conflict, such as insurgency or counterinsurgency, consists largely of a series of tactical actions; major operations are rare.

A campaign today is inherently multiser vice and often multinational. Hence, no single Service, including the Air Force, can plan and conduct a campaign. Yet that does not imply that a single Service cannot contribute far more to the outcome than other Services.

Foreign Terms

Translating a foreign military term is often full of pitfalls. This is a problem not just of linguistics but of different military cultures. The accuracy of the original term is often in question. In other cases, the entire meaning

some military terms are misunderstood partly because they are not well defined in the various Service or joint doctrinal publications

New Meanings for Old Terms

An increasing trend with Service and joint doctrinal documents is adding new meaning to well-defined and established terms. *Decisive point* was introduced by Jomini in *The Art of War* in 1838. Since then, the Jominian concept of what constitutes a decisive point has undergone changes, yet its essence has remained remarkably stable. In generic terms, a *decisive point* can be described as a geographic location or source of physical military power whose destruction or capture, control, defense, or continuous surveillance and monitoring would give an immediate and marked advantage over the opponent in accomplishing one's military objective. Today, geographic-, force-, and cyber-oriented decisive points or their combinations are differentiated; they exist at each level of war. The most important decisive points are those located in physical proximity to, or that allow access to, the enemy or friendly center of gravity or some critical enemy capability. A

accomplished. Also, any decisive point has less military significance than the nearby physical objective or center of gravity. For example, decisive points near the operational objective or operational center of gravity are usually tactical in their importance.

There is a shortage of common terms referring to methods of combat force employment. At the tactical level, the terms *attack*, *strike*, *battle*, *engagement*, and *raid* mean different things for each Service. JP 1-02 (2006) does not have an entry for *attack* and provides highly inadequate definitions for *strike* and *raid*. Another problem is that Service doctrines generally do not precisely define the terms for tactical employment of their respective combat forces.

In the U.S. military, *campaign* is one of the most often used and abused terms. Doctrinal documents either do not explain what constitutes a campaign or they define it improperly. Joint publications 1-02 (2006), 3-0 (2001), 3-0 (2005), and 5-0 (2006), for



Iraqi soldiers receive live fire training from U.S. Soldiers

1st Combat Camera Squadron (Ken Bergmann)

of the original term can be lost or drastically changed. Perhaps the classic case of mistranslation of a critical term is the rendering of Clausewitz's *Schwerpunkt* as "center of gravity." This term is widely used in the German military. Its meaning has changed considerably since Clausewitz's day and is now used for many purposes.⁵ Clausewitz wrote:

*One must keep the dominant characteristics of both states in mind. Out of these characteristics a certain Schwerpunkt develops, the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends. That is the point against which all our energies should be directed. It represents concentration of the enemy strength most vital to him in the accomplishment of his aim. If you could knock it out directly, it would be the most valuable target for your blows.*⁶

Properly translated, *Schwerpunkt* refers to the "weight of effort" (or literally the "point of main emphasis"), not "center of gravity."⁷ In German military theory and practice, the *Schwerpunkt* has a much broader meaning than what the U.S. military understands as center of gravity. In the military meaning, *Schwerpunkt* designates a theater, area, or place in which combat forces are massed to seek a decision or in which the commander expects a decision. The main factors in selecting a *Schwerpunkt* include the situation, terrain, and commander's intent. Each commander is responsible for concentrating his forces in the sector of the weight of effort (*Schwerpunktbildung*). When appropriate, a commander designates a weight of effort for his subordinate commanders. A change in the situation would require a shift in the weight of effort (*Schw-*

erpunktverlegung).⁸ To complicate the matter, *Schwerpunkt* is widely used for a variety of military situations, such as in designating the theater of main effort versus the theater of secondary effort and in force planning (for example, focusing on one category of forces or platforms versus another). The same term is also often used in politics, diplomacy, and other nonmilitary areas of activity.

Business Terms

Network-centric warfare enthusiasts are principally responsible for the steady influx of business expressions into the military vocabulary.⁹ This trend is exemplified by, for example, the terms:

- transaction strategy
- competitive edge
- competitive space
- leveraging
- human capital strategy
- Vice Chief of Naval Operations Corporate Board
- empowered self-synchronization.

The word *enemy* is being replaced with *threat*, *adversary*, or *opponent*. The term *lock in our success* was adopted from the business term *product lock-in*. Likewise, *battlespace awareness* was adapted from the business term *competitive space awareness*. In fact, the three pillars of network-centric warfare (information, sensor, and shooter grid) correspond to the business (Wal-Mart) model of information, sensor, and transaction grid.

The use of business terms is inappropriate when referring to any aspect of military theory and practice. Among other things, it creates the impression that the main job of the military is not killing but resolving conflict by using business practices. It also confuses and eliminates distinctions among various levels of war. The Department of Defense Office of Force Transformation (OFT) apparently does not share the widely known and commonly accepted definitions of what constitutes *strategy*, *operational art* (or as OFT calls it, *operations*), and *tactics*. It clearly considers each component of military art to be not much different from a business activity. Specifically, OFT asserted in 2003 that *strategy* selects a competitive space and determines the scope, pace, and intensity of competition; *operations* determines key competitive attributes and applies or masters them; and *tactics* executes in the battlespace.¹⁰ The authors are either oblivious to or completely ignorant of the fact that these terms are the result of both the prac-



U.S. Marine explaining to Moldovan army officer C² computer used in Exercise Combined Endeavor 2006, a communications and information systems exercise involving 41 nations

U.S. Air Force (Chris Willis)

tice and theory of centuries of warfare. They cannot be simply abandoned without throwing out the thinking of masters of war.

Another business term, *exit strategy*, is also extensively used by both the U.S. military and politicians, instead of *desired (strategic) endstate*. Among other things, exit strategy is associated with the benchmarks in a good business plan that serve for deciding when to call it quits. It was coined by the chief executive officer of Docutel Corporation (inventor of the automatic teller machine) in a story published in *The New York Times* in 1980. Not until 1993 was the term used in a military context. Former Secretary of State Warren Christopher used *exit strategy* in reference to Bosnia in his testimony before the Senate Appropriations Committee on April 27, 1993.¹¹ In fact, the purpose of a posthostilities or stabilization

phase is not to call it quits, but to consolidate and exploit strategic success. Hence, the term desired (*strategic*) *endstate*, is not only more accurate, but also more positive in its meaning than the much misused *exit strategy*.

Misapplied Tactical Terms

Network-centric warfare proponents have been largely successful in introducing new terms and imposing tactical perspective in discussing actions at all levels of war, including strategy and policy. This is perhaps one of the most corrupt influences these enthusiasts have

narrow tactical perspective among information warfare advocates.

Currently, *situational awareness* is applied to all levels of command and war, so no real distinction is made to indicate that the requirements for successful command at the operational and strategic levels are substantially different from those at the tactical level. Operational commanders must think *operationally*, not tactically, to succeed in operation planning and execution. Likewise, the term *theater* seems to be almost abandoned in the U.S. military; the focus instead is on the bat-

training in the correct use of military terms. The use of proper terms accurately conveys tactical or operational perspective and compels the participants in the discussion to use terms right. The lack of agreement on the meaning of military terms considerably complicates communications within a Service and among Services, as well as with allies and prospective coalition partners. **JFQ**

NOTES

¹ D. Holger Mueller, *The Character of Manoeuvre at the Operational Level* (Toronto: Canadian Forces College, 1999), 3.

² Joint Warfighting Center, *Commander's Handbook for an Effects-Based Approach to Joint Operations* (Norfolk, VA: Standing Joint Force Headquarters, USJFCOM, February 24, 2006), I–4.

³ Azar Gat, *A History of Military Thought: From the Enlightenment to the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 77.

⁴ Antoine Henri de Jomini, *The Art of War* (*Precis de l'Art de Guerre*), with an introduction by Charles Messenger (London: Greenhill Books, 1992), 101.

⁵ Timothy J. Keppler, *The Center of Gravity Concept: A Knowledge Engineering Approach to Improved Understanding and Application* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, June 1995), 15.

⁶ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 595–596.

⁷ Carl von Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege*, 16th edition, with comments by Werner Hallweg (Bonn: Ferdinand Duemmlers Verlag, 1952), 874.

⁸ “*Schwerpunkt*,” HDv 100/900 VS-NfD, *Fuehrungsbegriffe* (TF/B) (Bonn: Ministry of Defense, February 1990), Sch–SEA; related terms include “area of the point of main decision” (*Schwerpunkttraum*), “point of main decision in an attack” (*Schwerpunkt des Angriffs*), etc. Huerth, US-NfD, *Militaerisches Studienglossary Englisch*, vol. 2/3 (Bonn: Bundessprachenamt, January 1993), 1060; “*Schwerpunkt*,” Hermann Franke, ed., *Handbuch der neuzeitlichen Wehrwissenschaften*, vol. 1: *Wehrpolitik und Kriegfuehrung* (Berlin/Leipzig: Verlag von Walter de Gruyter and Co., 1936), 649.

⁹ Ironically, U.S. business is going in the opposite direction, increasingly adopting purely military terms in referring to their competitors.

¹⁰ Office of Force Transformation, *Network-Centric Warfare: Creating a Decisive Warfighting Advantage* (Washington, DC: Office of Force Transformation, Winter 2003), 3.

¹¹ Timothy Kane, “‘Exit Strategy’: A Mere Phrase, Not a Strategy,” *USA Today*, June 20, 2005, 15.

¹² Joint Warfighting Center, 112.

¹³ Clausewitz, *On War*, 132.

situational awareness was originally used to describe a pilot's perception of reality



U.S. Navy explosive ordnance personnel removing rocket that landed in Camp Victory, Iraq

1st Combat Camera Squadron (Denise A. Rayder)

on the current debate on various doctrinal issues in U.S. military terms. For instance, *situational awareness* is exclusively used in discussing the need for higher commanders to know and understand all aspects of the situation within their areas of responsibility. U.S. Joint Forces Command defines *situational awareness* as “knowledge and understanding of the operational environment, factors, and conditions, to include the status of friendly and adversary forces, neutrals and noncombatants, weather and terrain, that enable timely, relevant, comprehensive, and accurate assessments, in order to successfully apply combat power, protect the force, and/or complete the mission.”¹² This term was originally used to describe a pilot’s perception of reality. Situational awareness is purely a tactical term, not operational or strategic. Its extensive use in doctrinal publications is one of the best proofs of the predominance of a

timespace. This is more proof of how the narrow tactical perspective predominates among information warfare advocates.

In general, precise language is essential for the accurate transmission of ideas. Perhaps this is more critical in the national security field than in any other area of human activity. Clausewitz wrote that until terms and concepts are defined, one cannot hope to make progress in examining a question clearly and simply and expect the reader to share his views.¹³ In particular, the successful application of mission command is predicated on having not only common operational or tactical outlook, sound doctrine, common education and training, and healthy relationships between the commanders and their subordinates, but also a common vocabulary.

Indeed, doctrinal documents are the most important means of educating and